

VZCZCXRO0787
RR RUEHBZ RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEH DU #0053/01 1421041
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 221041Z MAY 09
FM AMCONSUL DURBAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1453
RUCNSAD/SADC COLLECTIVE
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
INFO RUEH DU/AMCONSUL DURBAN 0827

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 DURBAN 000053

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

FOR AF/S, INR

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SF](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: KWAZULU NATAL-NEW CABINET

DURBAN 00000053 001.2 OF 003

¶1. (U) Summary. New KwaZulu Natal (KZN) Premier Zweli Mkhize announced his new ten-member provincial cabinet during his inauguration ceremony on May 11, 2009. His team features four female 'Ministers' or MECs (Members of the Executive Council), including one Indian woman and one white woman. Below are short biographies for each of the cabinet members. End Summary.

Background

¶2. (U) The KZN cabinet has undergone some restructuring. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development was split up to create a separate Ministry of Finance, and a Ministry of Economic Development and Tourism. The Ministry of Housing, Local Government, and Traditional Affairs is now the Ministry of Local Government and Traditional Affairs; the Housing component was moved, renamed Human Settlements, and merged with Public Works to form the new Ministry of Human Settlements and Public Works. The Ministry of Arts and Culture and the Ministry of Sports and Recreation have been merged to form the Ministry of Arts, Culture, Sports and Recreation.

Cabinet Appointees

¶3. (U) Minister of Finance, Ina Cronje. Cronje served as KZN Minister of Education from 2005 to 2009 and created a positive image for herself as an actively engaged minister with a hands-on approach. Her ministry's performance during her tenure, however, was characterized by repeated drops in high school pass rates, violence in schools and a turbulent relationship with teacher trade unions. An educator and attorney by profession, Cronje is the former African National Congress (ANC) Chief Whip in the KZN legislature. She is a member of the ANC Provincial Executive Committee and the powerful Provincial Working Committee. Cronje is the only white in the KZN cabinet.

¶4. (U) Minister of Health, Dr. Sibongiseni Dlomo. Dlomo holds a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery, a Masters of Public Health, a diploma in HIV Management, a diploma in Palliative Medicine, and a MBA in Business Management Strategic Management. Dlomo worked at the University of KZN Nelson Mandela Medical School as the Manager of Faculty External Partnerships and Recruitment Director. Before being appointed as the Minister of Health, Dlomo served as the Deputy City Manager of eThekweni Municipality responsible for health. Dlomo is a former ANC military operative and was involved in many operations in KZN during the apartheid struggle. He is also the former Mayor of Newcastle.

¶5. (SBU) Dlomo takes over the Ministry of Health from a very

controversial figure, Peggy Nkonyeni, who was seen as an AIDS denialist and a supporter of Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, the former Minister of Health under President Mbeki. Nkonyeni overspent her department's budget by R1.5 billion (\$117 million) and is also currently facing charges of corruption and fraud related to procurement irregularities. Some question whether Dlomo is qualified to take on the challenge of improving the image and efficacy of such an important department, especially given that he has no provincial-level government work experience. His supporters, however, are confident that he has the necessary management skills and political clout to lead the department.

16. (SBU) Minister of Human Settlement and Public Works, Magasvarie 'Maggie' Govender. Govender is a former eThekweni Municipality councilor and University of KZN Professor of Education Management. Govender was a member of the Natal Indian Congress, an organization founded by Mohandas Gandhi to fight discrimination against Indians. During apartheid, she was an underground operative for the ANC and was arrested several times, including a nine-month detention. She was part of several high profile ANC military operations including Operation Vula, a plan to smuggle freedom fighters into South Africa. She was also very instrumental in the trade union movement and is credited for getting the conservative Garment Workers Union to become a part of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Govender is a close friend of new Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan; and her husband Sham Govender, also a former ANC underground operative, is a senior official at the South African Revenue Service (SARS). Govender has never been a member of the legislature or parliament, and her appointment came as surprise to many. Govender is the only Indian in the KZN cabinet and the first-ever female Indian member of the ANC to be appointed to the provincial cabinet.

17. (U) Minister of Transport, Community Safety and Liaison,

DURBAN 00000053 002.2 OF 003

Bheki Cele. Cele retains his cabinet position and is a member of the ANC National Executive Committee. Cele performed well in his portfolio and helped the ANC make inroads into Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) strongholds through his community-oriented poverty alleviation projects and by building roads and bridges in rural areas. He is the former chairperson of the biggest ANC region in KZN, eThekweni, and is credited for getting the eThekweni region behind Zuma prior to the 2008 ANC Polokwane conference. Cele has a history of political activism and was instrumental in founding the National Education Union of South Africa, now known as the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU). He has also served as the chairperson of several committees in the KZN legislature. Cele is known for his tough stance on crime and has publicly encouraged police officers to use the guns they have been issued to kill 'bad guys'.

18. (U) Minister of Agriculture, Environmental Affairs and Rural Development, Lydia Johnson. Former Minister of Public Works, Johnson was elected to the provincial legislature in 1999 and served as the chairperson of the Health Portfolio Committee. Johnson performed well in a high-profile portfolio and has been lauded for supporting small construction companies, including women-owned companies. She was the first woman to be appointed Deputy Speaker of the KZN legislature in 2005. She was a supporter of Thabo Mbeki prior to 2008 ANC Polokwane conference but still managed to be re-elected to the Provincial Executive Committee of the ANC.

19. (U) Minister of Arts, Culture, Sports and Recreation, Wesizwe Thusi. Thusi retains her portfolio with the added responsibilities of sports and recreation. She does not have the requisite background for this position, and her performance was not stellar. She has, however, been praised for supporting up-and-coming local artist and performers. Thusi is a qualified nurse with a history of trade union activism and has chaired the KZN ANC social transformation sub-committee. She is the former chairperson of the Health Portfolio Committee in the KZN

legislature and is a member of the ANC Women's League KZN Provincial Executive Committee.

¶10. (U) Minister of Social Development, Dr. Meshack Radebe. Radebe, who retains his position as Minister, is known as a peacemaker because he helped broker peace between the ANC and IFP in the Mpumalanga area Township of Hammarsdale during the 1980s. Radebe performed well in his portfolio and is credited for fighting corruption in the distribution of social grants. He is a member of the ANC KZN Provincial Executive Committee and is the former Mayor of Outer West Local Municipality. Radebe is also credited with helping the ANC penetrate IFP strongholds in rural KZN areas through government initiatives such as distribution of food parcels, natural disaster relief, and funeral assistance to poor families.

¶11. (U) Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, Mike Mabuyakhulu. Mabuyakhulu previously served as KZN Minister of Public Works, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, and most recently, Minister of Local Government, Housing and Traditional Affairs. He is a former trade unionist and has served as the provincial treasurer of the ANC. He holds an honors degree in Management and a MBA. Mabuyakhulu has been a member of the provincial legislature since 1994 and has been appointed acting Premier on many occasions. Mabuyakhulu is credited for getting traditional leaders to shift their allegiance from the IFP to the ANC by democratizing the House of Traditional leaders and by introducing benefits such as housing for traditional leaders, medical aid, and higher salaries for traditional leaders and their headmen.

¶12. (U) Minister of Local Government and Traditional Affairs, Willies Mchunu. Mchunu is the deputy provincial chairperson of the ANC and was the Deputy Speaker of the KZN legislature from 1994-2004. He was appointed Speaker of the KZN legislature in 2004 after the ANC won the province for the first time. In the 1980s, Mchunu was active in the United Democratic Front and civic struggles in the Durban area. Mchunu is a former trade unionist and a founding member of COSATU. He is also a former chairperson of the South African Communist Party (SACP) in KZN and member of its central committee.

¶13. (U) Minister of Education, Senzo Mchunu. Mchunu was until recently the ANC Provincial Secretary but resigned to join Mkhize's cabinet. A teacher by profession, Mchunu became a member of the provincial legislature in 1994 and served on many portfolio committees, including a stint as education committee Chairperson in 2004. Mchunu is credited with mobilizing grassroots support for Zuma throughout the province of KZN prior

DURBAN 00000053 003.2 OF 003

to Polokwane and helping the ANC run an effective election campaign in 2009. He is considered the most powerful ANC leader in the province and enjoys strong support among rank and file ANC members.

Comment

¶14. (SBU) Mkhize's efforts to include women and minorities in his cabinet have been met with approval, but his choice of ministers has surprised some within the KZN ANC. Although Nkonyeni's ministry was marked by controversy, her removal as Minister of Health was a shock to many who considered her untouchable given that she is the most senior female ANC member in KZN. Govender seemingly came out of nowhere, and many had expected Belinda Scott, KZN ANC Chairperson of the Finance Portfolio, to be appointed Minister of Human Settlement and Public Works. Although Amichand Rajbansi was personally devastated at not being called back as Minister of Sports and Recreation, the fact that his portfolio has been folded into another ministry states clearly that the ANC no longer needs Rajbansi or his party, the Minority Front, to rule in KZN.

¶15. (SBU) Mchunu is tipped to take over the premiership and the provincial leadership of the ANC from Mkhize when he moves on. Mchunu worked closely with Mkhize to mobilize support for Zuma

but this may change as he begins to position himself as the premier in waiting. Mchunu will likely want more influence and control over the provincial government (as he did during former Premier Ndebele's tenure), which may lead to conflict with Mkhize.

DERDERIAN